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## Hank Louis FOUNDER OF DESIGNBUILDBLUFF

**MISSION** Providing housing on the Navajo Reservation and hands-on education to University of Utah architecture students.

**AREA OF OPERATION** The Navajo Nation located in the southeastern corner of Utah.

Each January, 22 graduate students from the University of Utah's architecture program relocate for one semester to the tiny town of Bluff, next door to the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation. In a journey that's half humanitarian outreach and half educational gestalt, they'll design and build a low-cost, supremely energy-efficient home for one family living on the impoverished reservation.

"Learning in the real world is so many times better than listening to a lecture," says program founder Hank Louis. "I'm with these kids 12, 15 hours a day. They wake up and they are rolling. This is an opportunity to build better architects through teaching them to have compassion for other people."

Louis started DesignBuildBLUFF because he didn't think students emerging with architecture degrees had enough practical knowledge. They could design structures but hadn't a clue how to actually build them. At the same time, Louis saw the need for housing on the reservation. And so the idea emerged.

"Let's build these people quality houses and let these students figure out how to do it," he says.

Thus far, the program has built nine homes, and Louis

Hank Louis gives architecture graduate students hands-on real-life experience, while building sustainable homes in the Navajo Nation.



**How to help** DesignBuildBLUFF accepts donations, from cash to building materials. There is also a new program for volunteers to lend a hand on-site. For more information, visit [designbuildbluff.org](http://designbuildbluff.org) or call 435-649-7080.

has no plans to slow down. He has partnered with the University of Colorado and is working with students from there to build homes during the fall term, making for a year-round presence on the reservation.

What's next? "Last year we started looking at designing some prefabricated housing," Louis says. "We'd like to figure out a way to build a lot of houses at once and get them to more people."

### BY THE NUMBERS

**9** Homes on the Navajo reservation

**\$60,000**

Average cost for one student-designed home

**187** Students who have completed the program

**1,056** Average hours of work per home



Every home DesignBuildBLUFF creates is energy efficient and entirely a product of student design and labor. This home was built for a family during the 2009 school year.